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THE PLAY-PARTY

BY HARRIET L. WEDGWOOD

QUITE recently, upon my mentioning to a folk-song enthusiast some of the old play-party songs I had heard at various times, my attention was called to Mrs. L. D. Ames's article on "The Missouri Play-Party," published in the July-September (1911) number of this Journal. I was interested to find that I knew most of the songs quoted in that article, and some that were not mentioned. In some cases the wording of songs as given by Mrs. Ames agrees almost exactly with the wording I remember; in other cases it differs. In the "Happy Miller Boy" Mrs. Ames gives the last two lines as follows:

"Gents step forward
And ladies step back."

I have heard it sung so, also

"Ladies step forward
And gents step back;"

but it was more often sung

"The wheel goes 'round
And cries out '*grab*.'"

These lines agree with the last lines of the play-song "The Jolly Old Miller" as it was sung some years ago in Maine, but the rest of the Maine song differs altogether in its wording from the song as I used to hear it. The "Jolly Miller" of Maine, moreover, puts his hand into a "bag," while the Middle-Western "Miller Boy" puts his hand into a "sack" (even though it does not rhyme), perhaps for the reason that the Middle-Westerner uses "sacks," and not "bags."

While the play-party songs I have heard came, I believe, directly from Missouri, it was not in Missouri I heard them, but in southwestern Nebraska and southern Iowa.

When southwestern Nebraska was opened to homesteaders, about twenty-seven years ago, settlers came in, in considerable numbers, from the States a little farther east, — Missouri, Iowa, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, — and in less numbers from the other States and from Germany, Sweden, and Great Britain. The Swedes and Germans kept pretty well to themselves; but the others soon got acquainted, made visits, and began to plan amusements. There was very little possible in the way of amusement. Card-playing was regarded by many as the invention of the Devil, and dancing shared the same condemnation. Dancing, moreover, was hardly practicable in a community in which

most of the houses boasted, for the first year or two, of nothing but dirt floors, and where the violin was scarce, and the parlor-organ even more scarce. The play-party, though really a dance, was not so regarded by those who condemned dancing, and it had the advantage of being thoroughly practicable. A play-party play could be danced in the yard, on any kind of ground, by lantern-light or moonlight, and the music was furnished by the players themselves. Wherefore, for the first summer or two, the play-party flourished, until it was superseded by the dance; and it was practically the only amusement for summer evenings, as the "literary" (i. e., literary society) was for winter evenings; and, like the literary society, it was attended by the family *en masse*. In both and all cases the younger ones among us went to sleep before the evening was far spent, and missed what was going on (neither play-party nor literary society broke up till after midnight), wherefore I cannot remember our play-party songs entire, nor how some of them were played. I give, however, such as I now remember.

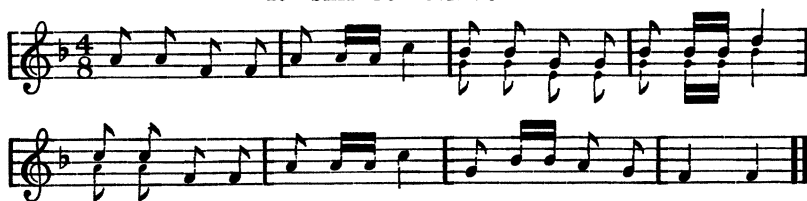
I. THE MILLER BOY



Oh, happy is the miller boy
That lives by himself,
Turning 'round the wheel
Is gaining all his wealth;
One hand in the hopper
And the other in the sack,
The wheel goes 'round,
And cries out 'grab.'"

Men and girls formed in couples and marched about in a circle, the girls on the outside of the circle. One man, without a partner, stood in the middle of the ring, and endeavored to secure a partner at the word "grab," when the couples exchanged partners by the girls taking a step forward, the men a step backward, or *vice versa*. The man left without a partner took his place in the centre, and the wheel began again to turn.

2. SKIP TO MYLOU



· · · ·
 Skip to my Lou,
 · · · ·
 Skip to my Lou,
 · · · ·
 Skip to my Lou,
 Skip to my Lou, my darling.

Gone again,
 Skip to my Lou,
 Gone again,
 Skip to my Lou,
 Gone again,
 Skip to my Lou,
 Skip to my Lou, my darling.

Stole my pardner,
 Skip to my Lou,
 Stole my pardner,
 Skip to my Lou,
 Stole my pardner,
 Skip to my Lou,
 Skip to my Lou, my darling.

I'll get another
 Prettier'n you,
 I'll get another
 Prettier'n you,
 I'll get another
 Prettier'n you,
 Skip to my Lou, my darling.

Pretty as a red-bird,¹
 Prettier too,
 Pretty as a red-bird,
 Prettier too,
 Pretty as a red-bird,
 Prettier too,
 Skip to my Lou, my darling.

Gone again, etc.

The "Skip to my Lou" was pronounced very much as if it were spelled "Skip tum'loo," the "skip" being very short and staccato, the "to my Lou" slurred into one word with the accent on the "Lou."

¹ Or blue-bird.

Couples formed in a circle as for the "Miller Boy;" but the figures consisted of a march, balancing, and a "grand right and left," the march beginning with different partners every stanza or two.

3. WE'RE MARCHING DOWN TO OLD QUEBEC



We are marching down to Old Quebec,
While the drums are loudly beating,

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.
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We're marching down to Old Quebec,
While the drums are loudly beating.

4. UP AND DOWN THE CENTRE WE GO



Up and down the centre we go,
Up and down the centre we go,
Up and down the centre we go,
On a cold and frosty morning.

Now's the time to chase the squirrel,
Now's the time to chase the squirrel,
Now's the time to chase the squirrel,
On a cold and frosty morning.

Catch her and kiss her if you can, etc.

Two lines formed, as for a reel, with the girls facing the men. At the second stanza a girl was pursued by a man down between the two lines and up on the outside, who kissed her if he caught her before she reached her place at the head of the line. This was one of the kissing-games.

5. THE JUNIPER-TREE



O dear Sister Phoebe
 How merry were we,
 The night we sat under
 The juniper tree,
 The juniper tree-ee,
 High-o, high-o,
 The juniper tree-ee,
 High-o.

Now take this hat on your head,
 Keep your head warm,
 And take a sweet kiss,
 It will do you no harm,
 But a great deal of goo-od
 I know, I know,
 But a great deal of goo-od
 I know.

Another stanza followed, which directed "Sister Phoebe" to "go choose her a man," or, if it were a man (Brother —) who was being addressed, to "go choose him a wife."

Men and girls formed a circle about an empty chair. A man chose a girl and seated her in the chair, after which he marched about the chair, placing a hat on her head, and giving her a kiss in the proper places in the song, after which he left her. The girl then rose up and chose a man, whom she led to the chair, after which the song began again, addressed to "Dear Brother — ."

6. OLD DAN TUCKER



Old Dan Tucker's come to town,
 Swinging the ladies all around,
 First to the right, and then to the left,
 And then to the one that you love best.

Get out of the road for Old Dan Tucker,
He's too late to get his supper.

Old Dan Tucker's a fine young man,
He washed his face in the frying-pan,
He combed his hair with a wagon wheel,
And died of the toothache in his heel.

Get out of the road, etc.

In this dance also the couples formed a circle; and the figures consisted of marching, swinging partners, grand right and left, etc.

"The Needle's Eye" was sometimes used as a play-party song, with the same words and tune that I have heard used in other places.

Some years ago I was teaching in a country school in southern Iowa, and attended a play-party at the home of one of my pupils. There were some familiar play-songs sung at this party, but more that were unfamiliar to me, only one of which I can remember.

7. FOUR HANDS ROUND IN THE EUCHRE RING



Four hands round in the euchre ring,
Four hands round, I'm gone,
Four hands round in the euchre ring,
With the golden slippers on.

Fare you well, my darling girl,
Fare you well, I'm gone,
Fare you well, my darling girl,
With the golden slippers on.

Four people (two couples) joined hands to form a circle. During the first two lines of the song, they circled to the right; during the next two lines, to the left. During the second stanza, they did a "right and left" and broke up the circle, — one couple going in one direction to meet a couple on one side, the other couple going in the opposite direction; so that new groups of four were formed, as in a Portland Fancy. This continued until the players were weary, or until the original couples came together again.